

MANY SIDES OF NEW YEAR'S



THE custom of celebrating the New Year by leaving behind, in theory at least, one's pet pernicious habit or besetting sin, may be hackneyed, but it certainly is not entirely relegated to the limbo of things forgotten or outworn. Some time New Year's day, when a quiet moment in the day's swirl offers time for thought, there will be a hasty taking stock of the year that is gone, a recounting of errors and failures, a silent promise that this or that will not occur again.

And what does it all amount to, after all, this old custom of revamping threadbare resolutions or selecting new ones? The cynic will smile and say that it is all a waste of effort, a flash in the pan, a half-hearted glossing over of mistakes by wordy and none too sincere promises of reform. The humorist will have his little fling in cartoon and witty quip and jest. He will gurgie with the sardonic glee of Robin Goodfellow over the folly of mortals and find in every resolve new subject for laughter. From the pulpit on Sunday will sound the admonition of the minister and the moralist. They will take good resolutions seriously, and set upon them the stamp of divine approval. And whether the wry sneer of the cynic, the mocking grin of the humorist, or the approving smile of the moralist prophesy the fate of the resolutions and their maker, it will be true that even the most momentary impulses toward better things will not be entirely wasted.

There was a time when, in the simple faith of childhood, you set down in black and white your promises to do better. On the first page of your new diary, a yearly Christmas present, you wrote in your best Spencerian hand—we knew none better in those days—something like this: "During this year I resolve not to lose my temper; not to be saucy at home; not to put off doing the things I dislike; to read my Bible every day." Direct, sounding blows were these on the chain mail of your besetting sins of a quick temper, a wickedly sharp little tongue, procrastination, and childish irreligion. Behind closed doors, lest any one see him in so meek a moment, Brother Dick was scribbling earnestly: "I promise myself not to be late for dinner, not to forget to wash my neck and ears, not to get in debt to father for my allowance, and not to play hockey a single day." Of course you failed, both you and Dick, before the little diary had its new gilt dimmed or the soft pendling of the latter had blurred itself into unapproachable illegibility. But the effort wasn't altogether wasted, and there were fewer fits of temper and cleaner neck and ears than would otherwise have been.

We grown-ups miss, as we get older, some of the past and gone adds to New Year's resolves. The day was once upon a time more marked by pleasant social customs. Only in officialdom is New Year's now a stately day of ceremonial. But it is not hard to recall that a decade or two ago there still survived some of the dignity and good cheer that had attached itself to the day. Before the Christmas fruit cake had all been devoured, or the stone jars of small cakes suffered too severely from the inroads of rapacious children, preparations for New Year's day were well under way.

Children were not included in this celebration. This was essentially the festival of their elders. Orders to keep from under foot were rigidly enforced, and did you wish to see the fun no place remained but the second-story landing, which gave somewhat inconspicuously upon the hall below, with a strained view of the big parlors, and none of the dining room beyond. That it was there and in full working order was evidenced by a keen sense of smell.

It was always great fun to wander up and down the principal residence streets as noon drew near, to find out who were to be at home and who were not. A basket tied to the door knob with gay red ribbons said, for all the world to hear: "We are not receiving today." If you were a boy and daring, later in the afternoon you stole up on the step to peep in and discover, by the number of cards within, the respective popularity of village maids and matrons. Wherever the door lacked the basket, you knew that behind the drawn shades there was the soft glow of candles or the yellow glare of gas, poor substitute for sunlight on snow, but presumably kinder to complexions and gowns just a trifle passe. And you knew that in each house, subject only to trifling variations of background, there would be enacted the same scenes.

Into the front door that opened at the first touch of the bell passed a fluctuating stream of men in holiday attire. There were elderly beaux aplenty in broadcloth that was brushed to the point of perfection, smart young dandies, sporting the newest fashion in ties; awkward beginners not quite used to the length of their frock coats—we called them Prince Alberts in the days when New Year's calls were in vogue—and a sprinkling of substantial-looking business men paying homage to the established custom of society. Everybody who was anybody in "our town" paid his devoirs to the incoming year by making the rounds of his friends' homes.

Once inside, there was the neat maid or solemn butler to receive the caller's card and help him with overcoat, hat and cane, and then a dash for his hostess and her daughters and friends, under the chandeliers with the prism



A FLUCTUATING STREAM OF MEN IN HOLIDAY ATTIRE

drops. "Happy New Year" resounded on all sides. In the course of the afternoon the indefatigable had seen all their friends, had sampled the choicest types of Christmas baking, had toasted again and again the New Year in punch of varying strength and pungency, or substituted coffee in homes where temperance principles were popular. They had said pretty things to popular dames in the stimulating atmosphere of holly and green wreaths, and had matched wits with fascinating damsels in the dangerous vicinity of mistletoe that still boasted some berries. It was all very gay, very informal, and very homey. At no other time or on no other occasion did the holiday hilarity reach so high a pitch.

"I'd like to do it all over again," is the testimony of one stately lady, whose home twenty years ago was the scene of yearly New Year's receptions. "No other social function on my calendar was such fun for the guests and so little trouble for the hosts. The decorating had been done a week before, and a few fresh flowers were all that were needed. Given bright lights, a dozen pretty girls to help entertain, the simplest cakes, and plenty of mildly exhilarating punch made from a recipe that my Kentucky grandfather declared harmless, and success was assured. When six o'clock came you had seen all the nice men of your acquaintance undisturbed by the usual influx of other women, and had sent them away at peace with the world in general and full of the spirit of neighborliness."

Meanwhile, upstairs in the library window seats curled the family small fry, watching the procession as it passed, commenting with juvenile frankness on the toilets of the callers, counting the visitors as they came, listening to the hum of voices downstairs, the girls hugging close to the sash, the boys making daring detours to "peek" through the balustrade, returning to report what young ladies were sitting on the steps with what young men, and even, in some cases, what they were saying. Longer up-toeing prowls, down the back stairs to the lair of a friendly cock, led to quick and jubilant returns with offerings of cake and claret cup, wherewith the hours might be be-

GREAT FUN TO WANDER UP AND DOWN THE PRINCIPAL RESIDENCE STREETS

guiled until six, when twinkling street lights warned the callers to retreat.

Not a serious way to start the New Year! No, but a friendly one, that left hostesses and callers with a glow of human friendliness to last as warmth for many a day. And if seriousness were lacking, the same decade that enjoyed New Year's calling found itself also at one with the custom of watch-night service. For, in "our town," as in yours, mayhap, it was the thing to spend the closing hours of the old year in the quiet seriousness of prayer and sacred song. Children had their share in this, for fathers and mothers had not in this simpler time learned to fear the giving of definite religious instruction to their sons and daughters. It was clear and plain that a child must be trained in the way he should go, and watch night was a part of that training.

And, indeed, no youngster ever tried to beg off. There was first of all the joy of doing the unusual and the fun of sitting up past his bedtime. So you hied yourself to the nursery couch or the sitting-room lounge, after a hot supper, an old-fashioned winter supper of sausage and fried potatoes or scalloped oysters and muffins, and took a long, long nap. At half-past ten, father waked you, tucked you into cap and overcoat, and the family party started out under the cold stars, snow crunching under foot, to the nearby church.

Not so very long ago the writer came across an old chrono, of the sort that looks, in a dim and favorable light, like a fairly decent oil painting. In its day it had doubtless been the chief ornament of a well-furnished, comfortable parlor. Now it cluttered the window of a second-hand shop, dingy and out of sorts with fate. But even in the unflattering light of a dusty show window, it had a certain charm for the one who found it. It was the picture of a watch-night service, such as she had once known so well. Bright moonlight flooded the scene, bringing out in sharpened detail the snow-laden boughs of drooping elms and the Gothic spire of a small stone church. From stained-glass windows and opened door came streaming the warm glow of shaded gas jets. From village streets flocked men and women and children, stopping to say a word of greeting as they passed into the vestibule. The spell of the picture took her, with the speed of the magic carpet or of the seven-leagued boots, back to the New Year's eves of her girlhood.

So she had walked with father and mother and a sleepy small brother. Just so the trees had looked in the frosty moonlight. And just as warm and softly glowing had been the stone church, through whose open doors came the resonant strains of the great organ. She remembered with aching vividness the faces

of those who had filled the pews, especially that of one man, the governor of the state, whose aquiline profile, flashing eyes and straight, glossy black hair formed a never-to-be-forgotten personality.

Watch-night hymns have a personality of their own, as those of Christmas or Easter, if not so widely known. They are naturally serious and a bit foreboding, with a touch of the melancholy that is associated with the rapid flight of time.

The year is gone, beyond recall
With all its hopes and fears,
With all its bright and gladdening smiles,

With all its mourners' tears,

is an old Latin hymn to a common meter tune that illustrates the tendency of this branch of hymnology. Charles Wesley has been most prolific in voicing this thought.

Wisdom ascribe, and might, and praise,
To God who lengthens out our days;
Who spares us yet another year,
And makes us see his goodness here,

is an old favorite. Often just on the stroke of midnight another of his voiced the feelings of the congregation, that beginning:

Join, all ye ransomed sons of grace
The holy joy prolong,
And shout to the Redeemer's praise,
A solemn midnight song

A bit more joyful is the splendid, quaintly irregular,

Come, let us anew our journey pursue,
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear.

It was easy after this to go home filled with loftiest aspirations, ready to begin the new diary with ambitious resolves that were bound to overleap themselves because of their very loftiness. There was one watch night when there drifted into the ken of the child the poem that has since meant to her, as it does to many, the very spirit of this day. From the choir gallery, just before the midnight hour, came the softened chorus of a strange melody. Then into the silence of the vaulted church rose a wonderful message in a voice that bore conviction to the listeners. It sang to the organ and the hushed accompaniment of the choir:

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild skies,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying, in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Through the whole of the splendid poem it swept, on to the triumphant conclusion:

"Ring in the Christ that is to be."

To the child the most dramatic moment of the evening came just on the stroke of the incoming year. While outside whistles blew and giant crackers exploded, bells clashed and clanged, inside hands clasped hands while together they sang the good old standby, "Blest be the tie that binds," before the hush of the benediction and the glad chorus of "Happy New Year's" that concluded the service.

There is another sort of quiet ushering in of the baby year that is conducive to the good resolve that counts so easily under favorable conditions. There were those in the old days, as there are in these, who felt that after the gala afternoon the happiest way of all was to sit quietly about the fire, chatting with half a dozen congenial spirits, singing a bit if the spirit moved, reminiscing as old times came back in the hush, and ending with the silent toast and the dash of sentiment that makes "Auld Lang Syne" the fitting song for such a moment.

That some such happy hour may begin little 1911's first appearance is the best wish one can offer to friends.

Let the auspicious morning be expressed
With a white stone distinguished from the rest.

So the stately Dryden has put the same thought. May it be true of us all.

JEROBOAM MAKES IDOLS

Sunday School Lesson for Jan. 8, 1911
Specially Arranged for This Paper

LESSON TEXT—1 Kings 12:25-13:6
Memory verses, 28-30.

GOLDEN TEXT—"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image."—Ex. 20:4.

TIME—Jeroboam reigned 22 years from B. C. 922, the date of the Disruption.

PLACE—The Disruption took place at Shechem, between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. He built up this town and made it his capital. The two religious centers or capitals were (1) Bethel, 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem, which was an ancient place of worship. (2) Dan was in the extreme north, also an ancient seat of worship. Bethel on the line of travel was admirably located to intercept pilgrims to the feasts who would otherwise have gone on to Jerusalem.

Jeroboam belonged to the tribe of Ephraim. He was born at Zereda in the Jordan Valley. His father's name was Nebat and his mother was Zeruah. He was one of the common people, as distinguished from Rehoboam of the royal family and son of one of the greatest monarchs the world has known. He was a man of great ability, a self-made man like so many of the greatest men in history. So marked as a controller of men, of such business capacity and energy, did he show himself in his work on Millo a fortress of Jerusalem, that Solomon placed him at the head of the forced labor hands of the northern tribes.

Thus Jeroboam became acquainted with the needs and harsh, unjust treatment of the people, just as David did during his seven years of exile during the reign of Saul. Thus he had a splendid opportunity for training in true kingship.

Jeroboam made the mistake of starting a rebellion against Solomon. But Solomon quickly put an end to that scheme, and Jeroboam escaped into Egypt, where it is said that he married the daughter of Shishak the king who afterwards invaded Judah. The announcement was made in order that Jeroboam might be prepared for the time when God's providence opened the way. Moses made a similar mistake when he began the deliverance of his people by killing an Egyptian in defense of one of his countrymen. He had to wait 40 years before the time came. But in both cases the mistake was overruled for good.

Jeroboam's opportunity lay in the condition God laid down, that he must obey God, keep his commandments and uphold the true religion. If he would succeed, there was no hope of success in any other way, from the very nature of things. A religion that inspired obedience to God, alone could unite the people, alone could keep them from the vices and corruption which are the sources of ruin.

Jeroboam in his desire to retain his kingdom adopted a plan which would destroy its very foundations, and make it a house built on the sand and not on the rock. He was a politician, i. e. one who seeks his own welfare first; not a statesman, who makes his country's good supreme. He trusted his own wisdom, and proved to succeed by defying God's conditions of success when he offered him the kingdom. It was the story of Adam and Eve repeated.

He feared that he would lose his kingdom, and the two he united under Rehoboam, if his people should go up to Jerusalem to attend the annual Jewish feasts prescribed by the law of God; that unity of religion would lead to unity of state. He had also the excuse that Rehoboam was a bad man, and a cruel oppressor. If the two kingdoms should unite under him, they would lose all they had gained by the revolt.

He made two calves of gold. "They were probably of considerable size, and represented a young bull full-grown bull." The Hebrews were familiar with figures of bulls, and "the most conspicuous object in the courts of Solomon's temple was its molten sea, supported on the backs of twelve bulls." The ox-symbol of God was most natural for an agricultural people, for whom the great animal, so powerful yet so docile, was the breadwinner, a material embodiment of the divine strength and beneficence. And he set the one in Bethel, near the southern border of the kingdom. And the other put he in Dan, an ancient place of heathen worship near the northern extremity of the kingdom.

And this thing became a sin. The doing this was a sin, and a means of sin. Jeroboam "pandered to the rude and sensuous instinct which makes materialism in worship so much more attractive, to all weak minds, than spirituality." Jeroboam's sin was disobedience. The necessity of obedience was plainly set before him. In the face of this condition, he disobeyed. He persuaded himself that Christ was tempted when Satan offered to give him all the kingdoms of the world, if only he would worship him. Jeroboam was ensnared and yielded to the glittering temptation in order to keep the kingdom entrusted to him.

Jeroboam's greatest wrong to his nation was the introducing of bad things under the names and auspices of good things. In the name of the religion of God, he introduced the deadly poison of idolatry which would destroy the true religion. He brought wolves in sheep's clothing into the fold of the sheep. This is one of the most common of Satan's devices. We are meeting it all the time in the adulterations of food under pure food labels.

The "devil of names" is very busy. But the greatest danger lies in the region of morals and religion.